

fable, but stands out from this group of tales as very different in tone. Here, the modern liberated Princess Zona interacts with her enchanted zucchini in a subversive manner far removed from that of her ancestress in the story of the frog-prince. And the fable (gothic to the male reader, comic to the female) is not so far removed from reality after all — the king and queen completely misread their teenage daughter's culinary experiments as expressing compliance with patriarchal roles and values.

"Degrees" and "Relics" are two of the most effective stories in this collection, characterized by their narrator and heroine's moral ambivalence, by their use of a transient foreign setting, and by the sense one gets that they could become or might have been potential novels. "Degrees" is the tragic story of Ruth Garwood, an East Indian academic wife in colonial Africa who struggles to be more British than her alcoholic British husband, adopted child (blond and blue eyed) and fellow housewives at coffee mornings and kiddies' birthday parties. Here, the interrelation of class, race and gender produce an unforgettable portrait of a woman who is colonized and despised, a far from loveable victim of the "ideals" of post-war domestic identity and post-Raj remnants of assimilation into empire. The story's centre of consciousness is appalled by Ruth's maltreatment of her African servants, cheap cotton housedresses, and extravagant silver tea service. Yet unlike the other wives, Ruth reveals no prejudice towards the Lebanese merchants who shops they all patronize.

The narrator avoids Ruth out of a sense of embarrassment as much as guilt, while feeling empathy and even anger when faced with Ruth's experience of callous indifference at the hands of virtually all the other women. The genuine concern of Mary Lamb, one rare saintly young wife, is refreshing but not reassuring given the general context of middle-class women's existence, selfless and secondary in Africa as in Canada:

It amused me how these women were always 'rushing up' something or 'dashing off' a letter or 'dashing to' town or 'popping in'. I suppose it gave their lives an illusion of urgency and importance they might otherwise have lacked.

Clearly the degrees of colonization, complicated by anti-feminism, are mirrored by the degrees of complicity within the narrator herself and, by extension, within the reader.

"Relics," also characterized by a first-person narrative voice and making additional use of temporal effects, is as convincing and almost as moving as "Degrees" — here the narrator-heroine revisits her old boarding house in a Scottish university town many years after the fact. Meditating on youthful paths not taken (abandoned lovers and other unknowns) Rose reconsiders her then superficial dealings with Morag, decides to visit the harried young single mother who had been her landlady, discovers that Morag has died, and mourns the lost potential for friendship. The story offers a woman's variant on the old theme of innocence and experience, with particular emphasis on youthful blindness, middle-aged vulnerability, and the difficulty of communication and so of love. I might add, at this point, that "Relics" is only one of many Thomas stories marked by intertextuality, in which bonding/bondage with other women writers such as Wilson, Gallant, Munro and Laurence adds to the emotional impact of the reading experience. This sense of community extends to all women, writers and mothers: in "Mothering Sunday," the narrator explores and explodes commercial clichés to realize, in the end, that "I have no right to laugh at Edna Jacques."

I am tempted to launch into an extended commentary on the last, title story, with its sudden unexpected twist opening vistas onto unacceptable, unforgettable scenery, to cite Alice Munro, but will leave you to enjoy it on your own. All I can say is that this is a short-story collection that I would not hesitate to teach it in any literature course as required state-of-the-art, but also that I would enthusiastically recommend to a non-literary female friend as a darn good read.

M. Lacombe

In Our Own Words (Northern Saskatchewan Metis Women Speak Out). Dolores T. Poelzer, and Irene A. Poelzer, Saskatoon: Lindenblatt and Harmonic Publishing Inc, 1986. Pp. 161. Sole Distributor: One Sky, 134 Avenue F South, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7M 1S8.

In Our Own Words is a window looking in on the Metis women of northern Saskatchewan. The reader cannot help but see and hear these women as, directly and simply, they speak the shape of their experience. The book began with them in the course of ninety-six interviews, undertaken by Irene Poelzer as she travelled from community to community in her second-hand half-ton truck, accompanied by her large Lab/Setter, Big Foot. The book ends with them and their suggested solutions to the problems they

perceive as stemming from the harsh realities of northern social and economic change.

A compelling aspect of the book stems from the authors' method itself. They have chosen to report with description rather than by explanation and theory. These latter will have their important role in later analysis. For now, the authors' anecdotes, introducing every chapter, place the readers within the research experience itself, inviting them to reflect on the concerns raised by the Metis women.

The original conversations, open-ended and unstructured, allow the interviewed women to surface their own hopes, concerns, interests and fears. These emerge around, and were later categorized, as (1) the world of development including information on native culture, resources, employment and economics, (2) the salient aspects of the institutions of religion, education, politics and the media, as perceived by the Metis women, (3) the women's world, focussing on marriage, family and personal growth, (4) certain dimensions of the problematic world of northern Saskatchewan Metis people, including alcoholism and drug abuse, and (5) certain cherished aspects of northern living as the "world of the beautiful."

The book is timely. The issues make it so: issues such as the changing familial roles, the question of whether to endure change or influence it, and the role of women in the church. It is timely as well because of the particular method or research-expertise of the authors. Throughout the systematic analysis of the data and the assessment and re-assessment of the categories, one senses the authors' growing admiration and concern for the women interviewed. These women emerge, finally, not so much as the marginalized Metis, but as the subjects of their own experiences, empowered to grapple with change. Wherever there are women and men concerned about the transformation of structures, these will find the fruit of such a method heartening.

In Our Own Words is a book for the general public, as well as a text for educational and academic circles striving to understand issues pertaining to women and to native people.

Margaret Ordway

Three Lives in Mine. Grace Irwin. *Irwin Publishing Co., 1986.*

Writer, former high school classics teacher and Congregational minister, Grace Irwin, was born in 1907, the treasured youngest child in a Victorian Toronto Methodist family. The tone of the surreptitious autobiography is often one of rage and its "first strike" target is, superficially, the 1970s feminist movement. However, before REAL Women rush to celebrate her as a spiritual foremother as they have a superhumanly historicized version of Nellie McClung,¹ they might want to note that the man Miss Irwin idolizes most in this book (her father) was born in 1852. Paradoxically, but not unexpectedly, there are incredibly insensitive sermons on "Motherhood" and "The Family" in these memoirs by a very talented 80 year old woman who was neither coaxed into "companionate marital bliss" in the 1920s, nor launched into the wealthy homogeneous "dream family" of the 1950s and 1960s. Although quite painfully reactionary at times, *Three Lives in Mine* is poignantly fascinating to biographers, and especially to those interested in sensitively charting the psychic shoals encountered by publicly accomplished women. What is delightful about Miss Irwin's male "trinitized" autobiography is that this dutiful daughter and sibling cannot completely suppress her powerful mother and sister, or tuck them away in cozy "help-mate" categories as is so often in other masculinist biography. While Miss Irwin unfairly displaces her fears and intellectual frustrations onto post-war II educational progressives and feminists, it would be naive not to expect that she would chart her own life in the public and deeply sentiment-laden existence of the three men heralded in the title of her book. Her father, her brother, John, and her beloved friend, Harold Kent did provide chivalrous (and shallow) mentorships which lit a few public pathways for Miss Irwin's own ambitions and, of course, left her with inadequate conceptual frameworks to explain what she has achieved (as feminist intellectuals well know). Thus, what lies in wait for Miss Irwin's feminist readers are fascinating and accomplished slices of social and cultural history interrupted by treacherous and chilling emotional and intellectual blindspots. However, the tolerant, dedicated reader can sometimes fill in the blanks using "extraneous," puzzled musings that dot this interesting book.

Grace Irwin's childhood was spent under the publicly powerful protection of a modest but successful Victorian paterfamilias, a convention her well-connected, business smart mother, Martha, necessarily continued to stage manage, even after the death of patriarch John Irwin Sr. in